From Local Government to Local Governance: And beyond?

Caroline Andrew; Michael Goldsmith

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CAROLINE ANDREW AND MICHAEL GOLDSMITH

ABSTRACT. This article presents an overview of local government studies and particularly of recent developments. It looks first of all at the changing social and economic factors which influence the operation of local government. Globalization, political and institutional changes, demographic trends—all these structure the environment of local government. The article then looks at the changes in local government, best understood as a movement towards local governance. Finally, the article raises questions about the kinds of local government that would be the most desirable and most appropriate given the changes that are taking place.

Local government around the world has been undergoing a process of change over the last ten or twenty years. Much of this process is the result of external changes over which individual local governments have had little influence: increasing economic interdependence; the process of globalization; changing technologies; or the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, for example. Some external change would be the consequence of changes taking place within the nation-state: the privatization of state services; restructuring the local government system; changing inter-governmental relations. Some changes are political, in the partisan sense, as when political control changes in a municipality, while others might be social: widening social segregation in cities; growth in drug related crime, for example. And some will be generated from within local governments themselves, be they processes or delayering, privatization, and contracting out of services; attempts at improving customer care and citizen relationships; or whatever. The changing nature of the modern state and of the society it serves has had inevitable consequences for elected governments.

This article does three things. First, it reviews the changes which have affected local government and continue to do so. Second, it reviews the changes which have taken place within local government, giving rise to the currently fashionable idea

of local governance, and suggests some consequences of these changes. Last, it asks questions about what kind of local government we might want or need in the light of the changes taking place and indicates answers that need addressing.

The Changing Social and Economic Environment

Most of these changes could be summed up in one word: globalization. But the world covers a multitude of phenomena and a number of sins. It is possible to overestimate the extent of the globalization process, but it cannot be ignored. Half an hour with any local authority chief executive officer, astute local political leader, or local economic development team quickly raises the spectre. At its centre lies increasing economic interdependence. The creation of the single market inside the European Union provides an example of this phenomenon, but it is a worldwide one. Table wines are as likely to come from Australia or Chile as from France or Italy; roses from Colombia or Kenya as from traditional English rose growers, while the machine on which this article was produced, though assembled in the UK, most likely had its parts produced somewhere in the Pacific Rim countries.

Mention of the Pacific Rim countries highlights another feature of the globalization process, namely the shifting centres of manufacturing power around the world, with the Tiger economies now joining Japan, itself having joined North America and much of Western Europe as a major manufacturing centre. But there have also been important movements within countries. For example, as indicated by the move from the so-called frostbelt to the sunbelt (from the north east-mid west to the south) in the United States or developments within regions such as in Europe, where Britain has become a low-wage, flexible labour economy. One consequence of this change has been a weakening of the power of organized labour through trade unions. In Britain in particular, successive legislation from Conservative governments since 1979 has weakened trade unions extensively, whilst the move to the south in the United States related to the less heavily unionized labour force present in the former south. And, of course, weakening unions in the manufacturing sector has implications for the ability of unions in the public sector to exert influence.

Equally important have been the changing technologies and the search by governments for ways of encouraging innovation and technology transfer, as well as the concentration of research activities in such areas as biotechnology and semi-conductors. Currently worth watching are the changes in the communications industries, particularly the satellite and telephony areas. In this context, the best example is the rapid spread of IT, an industry in which the best advice given to would-be purchasers is to put off buying for three months, since the advances are so rapid that currently cutting-edge technology will then be available at much the same price as today's less esoteric products; but earlier examples are products such as the motor car, washing machine, and television—all yesterday's luxuries now taken for granted as today's necessities.

Arguably driving these changes, and an important aspect of the globalization process has been the changing nature of capital. It is this which has given rise to what have come to be called the global cities of London, New York, and Tokyo (Sassen, 1994; Fainstein, 1994). Three changes in particular can be noted. First, there has been the rise of the property industry, in which large-scale developers have made and lost fortunes developing land and specific sites within cities. Second, there have been changes in the structure and operation of the retail trade, with the

associated rise of out-of-town shopping centres, shopping malls, super- and hyper-markets, and of the dominant retail groups. Third, there have been changes within the finance sector itself, most particularly changes associated with the deregulation of financial markets, whereby mortgage companies, insurance firms, and banks now all buy and sell similar products and in which there is increasing concentration of ownership on a regional, if not global, scale. Finance capital thus changed is much more international and footloose. In particular, ownership of shares is much more concentrated in the hands of insurance companies and pension funds, the managers of which are much more concerned with short-term performance of the companies they control rather than long-term prospects.

In this context one has also to note the growing importance of multinational companies in areas such as oil, automobiles and pharmaceuticals. Such companies owe loyalty to no nation-state and are concerned to locate where it is to their best advantage in tax, labour cost, or raw materials terms. Such companies are also able to compete for top-flight labour in an international market, locate research and development facilities where it is advantageous and seek to extort the most advantage in investment deals with national, regional, and local governments when it comes to making location decisions. Worth noting too is the blurring of the public/private boundaries in this area, as with French and American water companies buying into British water, transport, and power industries, as well as in the waste management area, where one also finds construction companies active.

Other factors come into play. The collapse of communism and the end of the cold war brought with them the so-called peace dividend. But for those cities in which defence industries have played a major role in maintaining and improving the local economy, such a dividend is a negative one. Companies involved in both military and civil aviation, as well as in related defence activities, such as the production of missiles and ammunition, have had to undergo considerable restructuring, as the example of such companies as British Aerospace and Aerospatiale in Britain and France, or of Volvo and Bofors in Sweden would demonstrate.

All the above are just a few examples of the process of economic globalization and economic interdependence, all having consequences for local governments. There have been winners and losers, and the literature has stressed the idea of the innovative, renewable, sustainable city, perhaps overstressing the idea in terms of the sustained successful adaptation of cities. Cities have come to recognise that they need to be internationally competitive in the world economy, and nobody wants to be second-class in the competition. In North America and Western Europe, as well as in parts of the Third World, there has been a considerable growth in the role played by local governments in terms of local economic development. While one might argue that such "economic boosterism" has always played a major role in North American cities, certainly in Western Europe, with its older and stronger development of the welfare state, economic development has become a much more recent concern, even if in some countries it reflects a return to earlier nineteenth-century interests.[1]

But in this context of economic globalization it is important to bear in mind the extent of political change taking place. While there is no world government which is capable of exerting some degree of regulation over the economic changes, a number of changes are worth noting. First, there is the increasing role of the UN (or should it be the US?) as a peacekeeping enforcer in different parts of the world. Second, there are a number of important emerging or established international or regional groupings. The European Union is the most politically formalized of such

groupings, but it is also worth noting the institutionalization of the North American Free Trade Area, which links Mexico and Canada to the United States, and of the ASEAN/Australasian links. Such developments, together with the economic changes already discussed, raise doubts about the continued importance of the nation-state and its ability to regulate activities within its boundaries. Within Europe, one should also notice the rise of the so-called meso or regional level, not only within the European Union, where countries such as France, Spain, and Italy have strengthened the intermediate tier; in other countries with nationalist pressures operating at the regional level (Basques and Catalans in Spain; Flemish and Walloons in Belgium; Welsh and Scottish in the United Kingdom); but also in countries outside the EU, such as the former Yugoslavia, where the regions have made themselves felt, often claiming nation-state status if not achieving it.

In many countries the local level is marked by fragmentation of institutions, or the rise of what has been called in Britain "local governance". Another way of thinking about this process is in terms of marketization of the public sector, whether through the creation of special agencies or of special purpose bodies (well known in major North American cities), processes of contracting out or compulsory competitive tendering (CCT), or privatization. This process of "reinventing government" (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992) has been undertaken in the name of efficiency and effectiveness and has been very much dominated by market values.

Matching this process has been a decline in the legitimacy and consensus about state institutions, about the ability of political parties to translate political demands into effective political action, and increasing disillusionment with political processes, which often seem closed to public influence and open to corruption. In many ways this disillusionment with politics reflects the inability of class/welfare-based systems of politics and parties to cope with issues of the new political agenda and with rising popular expectations, something to which we will return shortly.

Before doing so, however, let us look at a number of what might be called "social changes" which are taking place within localities, especially within cities. First, there is the increased migration and mobility of people, especially within Europe. Movements, for example, of North Africans to France, of Turks to Germany and Scandinavia, of Asians to Australia and less markedly to North America, of central Europeans nearly everywhere, as well as youth mobility generally. One result, also fuelled by economic restructuring processes, is growing social segregation within cities—rich areas and poor areas; black and white ones, which are linked also to a physical process of gentrification so that old working class areas disappear, as in cities like Paris or Florence. These changes also lead to an increased underground economy, as well as greater crime (both serious—drugs, and less so—petty theft), with the possible emergence of so-called "no go" areas.

Perhaps the most significant change, at least in the Western developed world, is the growing dependent elderly populations in many countries. People live longer, they have fewer children. One consequence of this trend is that fewer people in the workforce have to sustain a larger dependent population. But a growing elderly population places greater strains on expensive welfare systems (health care), just as large numbers of unemployed place a strain on social security budgets. Changes of this kind, linked to perceived limits on the ability of governments to finance expensive services through increased taxation, have given rise to the fiscal crisis of the state (O'Connor, 1973), often interpreted as a major problem for city governments (Mouritzen, 1992; Clark and Ferguson, 1983).

In the context of these social, economic, and political changes, the environment in which city and local governments operate has been undergoing, and continues to face, rapid change. Such an environment has been and continues to be very unstable, placing a premium on governments (both national and local) to be flexible, innovative, and adaptive, to "reinvent" themselves, or to move away from (local) government towards (local) governance.

It is in this context that we need to refer back to an earlier point—the real or imagined crisis of legitimacy facing governmental institutions, political parties, and political processes, in which the gap between promise and performance often seems to voters to leave much to be desired. Old coalitions of voters and parties have broken up or disappeared over the last twenty years, both in Western Europe and in North America, and the class-based social democratic welfare state politics of the fifties and sixties no longer seems either relevant to the needs of the nineties and beyond or able to cope with new demands and pressures. Three kinds of new issues are worthy of mention in this context. First, issues relating to gender, with women under represented in legislative and executive positions on the national and local level in many countries, and discriminatory practices persist, even though reforms have been introduced. Second, there are issues relating to minorities, whether of colour, creed, or nationality. For example, a review of unemployment in most Western countries would reveal that black ethnic minorities, especially amongst the younger age groups, feature far more heavily in the numbers of unemployed than their numbers in the population would legitimately lead one to expect. But minority groups of so-called guest-workers may find their "rights" are less than those of native-born members of a country, even when they have been encouraged to move from their home country to another—the position of Turkish groups in some Western European countries would be an example. Third, there are issues relating to the environment and sustainability, issues with local, national, and international dimensions with which governments at all levels are unable to cope, be they matters of water quality, industrial pollution, acid rain, destruction of the rain forests, or problems with the ozone layer.

Incorporating the demands to which such issues give rise into the traditional mode of politics and parties has largely failed, leading to new and more fragmented representation (increase in parties; fragmented representation in legislatures;coalition governments). Issue-based parties and pressure groups are more active; traditional parties face a decline in their share of votes and seats. In Clarence Stone's terms, the result in many localities is that the regime, or governing coalition, is undergoing a process of change resulting from the (apparent) lack of legitimacy (Stone, 1993). In Britain, for example, one major change at the local level has been the marked increase in the number of "hung councils," in which the municipality is under the control of a coalition of parties or run by a minority party, and where political control can change from one election to another quite easily (Leach and Stewart, 1992).

Furthermore, in some countries—and Britain is a notable example, but New Zealand and Australia are others[2]—changes have been imposed on local government from above. The United Kingdom is the "brand leader of local governance" in many respects, introducing a whole raft of new bodies at the local level, mainly special purpose bodies, all appointed, whilst removing functions from elected local governments at the same time (Cochrane, 1996).

These two processes reflect the loss of legitimacy at the local level and give rise to the fragmented structures referred to by the generic title of local governance.

What is meant by this? By "legitimacy" we mean support for, and acceptability of, governmental initiatives and actions broadly defined, something not far removed from Easton's (1965) concept of political support. It is important to distinguish this concept from legal or juridical ones, which refer to the expectations that courts will uphold the law, even though something may not be widely supported. For example, many motorists disobey speed restrictions, acting illegally but perhaps reflecting a doubt about the legitimacy of such restrictions. If caught, such offenders will be dealt with by the law and can expect to pay considerable penalties, but it remains doubtful whether the existence of such penalties deters motorists from speeding.

So what does the declining legitimacy of local government mean in this context? In the British case, it seems to mean a decline, especially amongst national government elites, in the support local government has as a multi-purpose service producing and providing structure. The ability of local governments to change modes of service delivery, to reduce the ever-rising costs of extended welfare provision, or restrict levels of local taxation and expenditure has been challenged in more than one country since the seventies. Even in countries such as Norway, Sweden, and Denmark, where attachment to a strong welfare state remains firm, debates about how such a system can be sustained and paid for, and the part of local government within it, have taken place in recent years. What Goldsmith has referred to on occasion as the Northern European model (Goldsmith, 1992) has been challenged, but one also finds similar challenges to local government in countries like the United States and Australia. This model is best defended in L. J. Sharpe's argument about the efficiency of local government as a service provider (namely, as a coordinator of services in the field); as a consumer pressure group (for better services and more spending); and as an agent for responding to rising demand (Sharpe, 1970).[3]

In this context, local governance can be taken to mean the replacement of this view of local government, with its attendant structures and procedures, by a plethora if not a plurality of providers: as fragmentation of the system in which there are an increasing number of special purpose ad hoc bodies, an increased use of appointed as distinct from elected bodies as well as increased state or central control of local government activities and finance.[4] To this definition, in Britain as well as in North America, Western Europe, and Australasia, can be added what can be called the commodification or marketization of public services, via such practices as privatization of services, contracting out, and compulsory competitive tendering—or the introduction of a contract culture into the world of local government.

Analytically separate, but an important element of this culture, is what might be called the consumerist trend reflected in the persistent search for increased effectiveness, a greater sensitivity to user needs, and better evaluation of performance through the use of such devices as performance indicators and citizen charters. This is not to deny that such changes bring improvements in the performance of local governments as service delivery agents,[5] but that the process of marketization changes the relationship between the individual and the municipality.

Two points need to be made. First, local governance is not new, if by this we mean a plurality of local bodies performing local service functions. It was a feature of much of nineteenth-century British local government, for example. Similarly, the use of appointed bodies and fragmentation also characterises much of North American local government, especially in metropolitan areas. Second, there are varying models of service delivery in many countries. For example, public/private partnerships, as well as some form of contracting out are found in other southern European

countries. Notwithstanding these points, however, the changes which have led to the new form of local governance bring with them a number of consequences, some of which strengthen local government systems, some which weaken such systems.

If we first consider the most important strong feature of the new system, it is the opportunity it offers for elected local governments to learn from institutional innovation. In Britain, for example, the assumptions on which the old producer-dominated system of local government was based were very much challenged by the move towards local governance, and it could be argued that it needed such a challenge. Second, as the experience of the United States and elsewhere has demonstrated, special purpose bodies are easy to create, and allow efforts and resources to be concentrated on specific problems. Third, moves towards contracting out and privatization of services, as well as compulsory competitive tendering, allow for the task, contract, and performance measures to be clearly specified, whether it be central government working with a special purpose agency, or an elected local government contracting out its refuse collection service.

But local governance brings with it a number of weaknesses, too, not least the fact that the system of local service provision and of local governance generally is far more complicated than the previous single agency system. The plurality of service-providing bodies is often difficult for the consumer to understand. Furthermore, there are increasing problems of accountability with the range of agencies providing local services, which in turn may reinforce the problems of coordination and strategic direction as different agencies compete for resources and action space with each other and with elected municipal governments. The latter especially find themselves spending more and more time building networks and working in a variety of partnerships with other local agencies, though such developments may in fact strengthen the basis on which the system is operating.

Fourth, the general trend towards replacing values of citizenship with those of consumerism, which is associated with the move towards governance, brings with it a further weakening of legitimacy for institutions and processes. It may also be difficult for the consumer to exercise choice effectively or to secure redress when services do not meet expectations. Such a view does not suggest that all is well with systems based on elected local governments; indeed, many of those face similar problems of legitimacy, of enforcing accountability in the short run, and of securing redress against maladministration and poor service provision.[6] Last, but not least, elected local government, seen by many advocates from John Stuart Mill through to John Stewart and others today as a bastion of the democratic system, is seen to lose status and position in the face of competition from the new local agencies.

Local Government—New Empirical and Normative Perspectives

Where do we go from here? Essentially there is a need to rethink the role which we want local level institutions, especially elected local governments, to play in our systems of government and democracy. Such a consideration requires us to examine the empirical world as well as the normative one, and we want to explore two avenues in this context—current values and future possibilities.

The classic statement of the value of elected local government is that of John Stuart Mill. His position rested on two main arguments. First, that local elected institutions are an essential element in a democratic system of government because they widen opportunities for political participation as well as providing for the

education of citizens in the practice of politics and government. We shall return to this line of argument shortly. Second, Mill believed that an elected local government was necessary because of its ability to oversee the affairs of the locality, based on local knowledge, interest and expertise, and makes it more likely that efficient and effective local services will be provided than by other agencies and certainly by a distant central government.

But other virtues also contributed to the nineteenth-century view of the value of an elected local government. For example, Toulmin-Smith saw elected local government as a bulwark against centralism, something that would allow the expression of opposition to an overly centralized state, an early form of territorial politics, one which came to be marginalized in some countries, less so in others.

Views about an elected local government as being both democratic and efficient can be found in the writings of many British and other academics, as well as in official reports and among opinion leaders today. Such views certainly underpinned British reforms from the sixties through to the mid-eighties, as witnessed in the work of such official bodies as the Redcliffe–Maud and Widdicombe Committees. Three academic examples would include L. J. Sharpe (originally a strong supporter of the efficiency argument for local government and who was research director for Redcliffe–Maud); K. Young (an advocate of aspects of the participation argument who also worked for the Widdicombe Committee), and John Stewart, who has not only promoted the participation and efficiency arguments over the last thirty years, but also the localist one through his view that elected local governments allow for the effective exercise of local choices.

British arguments such as these have dominated much of the literature, especially the early reform work, and have reflected the debates about current British experience. But it would be strange if all countries followed suit. In a recent book, as well as in an earlier study, Wolman and Goldsmith explore Anglo-American and European comparisons (Wolman, 1996; Goldsmith, 1996; see also Wolman and Goldsmith, 1992). Essentially underpinning these arguments is a concern to stress the importance of cultural differences reflecting different historical experiences—values, beliefs, and expectations about the role and scope of government generally and elected local government in particular. Thus, in the case of the United States, for example, Wolman argues that there is a "commitment to it [local autonomy] and localism which is so strong that debate over the role of local government is rare." He goes on to elaborate some other "values" on which he believes the United States is strong. He points to the widespread acceptance of the Jeffersonian idea of individual sovereignty, which stresses both individualism and individual participation, and to the acceptance of the Madisonian tradition of pluralism, in which elected local government is seen as a vehicle for democratic decision-making, as well as limited support for the efficiency argument, echoes of which are to be found in Sharpe (1973). By contrast, Wolman argues that the British stress only the efficiency argument as against the American emphasis on the pluralist and localist arguments, with each ignoring the other.

Goldsmith's contribution on Europe follows his well-known predilection for dividing Europe into northern and southern blocs. He sees the essential difference between the two types as being one which follows Page's (1991) useful distinction between legal localism and political localism. Using this distinction, Goldsmith suggests that the northern group (including the Scandinavian countries, Britain and The Netherlands) reflect a form of legal localism in which there is a general belief in the value of local self-government and decentralization. This belief has given

elected local government as an institution an important role in how public services are shaped and delivered. Though custom and practice play their part, in this model rather more weight is placed on the formal constitutional basis of local government, or on legal localism in Page's sense.

Goldsmith argues along with Page that the southern group (Belgium, France, Spain, Italy, and Greece) all stress forms of political localism, with the values of communitarianism being strong and territorial representation in various forms being its main and essential feature. As such these values reflect a sense of communality and collectivity largely absent from the northern group, a sense which brings centre and locality together and allows local interests to be represented nationally. The form of representation is often highly personalized and ambiguous, giving rise to clientelistic practices and possible corruption, a strong contrast to the northern group.

But even if we accept that there are different values attributed to local government and local democracy in different cultures and societies, is this enough? We think not. In the evolving modern state, with its variety of institutional forms and practices (governance), and in an ever-interdependent world, the time is right for a reconsideration of the role which local democracy, elected local government, and representatives might play. First, there has to be a reconsideration of the existing values we have stressed, and in particular the role of local government in promoting democracy through the enhancement of citizenship and participation by the individual.

The link between urban management and the construction of citizenship is an emerging theme in much recent writing about local government (Soledad Garcia, 1996; Hill, 1994; Burns et al., 1994). However, in much of this literature it is clear that the concept of citizenship is being used in different contexts and with a variety of meanings.

Citizenship is used, for example, to come to grips with some of the governance issues associated with the increasing diversity of urban centres, particularly in cultural and ethnic terms. Both elected and non-elected officials are increasingly aware that local governments have a role to play in the governance of this diversity. This awareness takes different forms: demands that national governments consult them in making or implementing immigration policy; demands for financial compensation for undertaking the work of national governments; the introduction of programs to create and promote a local government workforce more representative of the local population; the creation of activities designed to increase cross-cultural understanding, and the improvement of services specially adapted to the needs of ethno-cultural groups. Linking these somewhat disparate actions is the objective of integrating these different, sometimes new, sometimes old, communities. The notion of citizenship captures this idea of a sense of belonging, through equal access to services and jobs, comprehensible procedures for improved participation, and/or articulated visions of inclusiveness. The concept of citizenship suggests the possibility of public actions that construct locality, and reasons for loyalty, to the local community.

The practical dimensions of these governance questions focus on accessibility and equality issues as they relate to local government service provision and policymaking. If people do not have access because they do not speak the language in which policies are made or services provided, accessibility is limited. If services and policies are culturally inappropriate, inequity results.

Equity, accessibility, and political participation can be increased by the direct involvement of these diverse groups in the making of public policies. In some areas,

ethno-culturally specific services have been created by local voluntary groups, and in many cases subsequently funded and supported by local governments. In other cases, local governments have taken the initiative in devising means by which excluded groups can be brought into policy-making and service provision processes. Burns et al. (1994) describe some of the experiments undertaken in the two London boroughs of Tower Hamlets and Islington, examples which could be replicated in cities around the world. Efforts such as these need further study—see Stoker's contribution in this issue—and their impact assessed, if only to balance the view that such service activities are little more than cooptation by the local state.

The idea of citizenship as a way of thinking about questions of accessibility and equity relates not only to the question of the ethno-cultural diversity characteristic of many urban centres, but also to the variety of social groups seen to be in positions of unequal power, and whose ability to affect local services and policies is diminishing in the face of the increasing segregation found in many cities. Attention has been given in the literature to the problems faced by the poor, by women and the elderly, by gays and lesbians, and increasingly by those groups defined by the intersections of race, class, and gender. In particular, issues raised about the political or citizenship consequences of service provision activities have been studied in relation to women's groups (Adamson et al., 1988)

This intersection introduces a further cluster of meanings involved in the use of the concept of citizenship—citizenship as a mechanism to counter the marginalization and exclusion of increasing sectors of the urban population. French urban policy, for example, has linked "le développement social des quartiers," that is, the creation of solidarity and citizenship as a way of offsetting the negative consequences of urbanization and current economic development. Though the use of the concept is similar to that discussed above, in this context it is the processes of capitalist urban development which are seen as explaining the increased exclusion and marginalization of the urban population rather than the diversity resulting from patterns of migration. But citizenship is also used as an organizing concept by researchers interested in questions of identity. Citizenship speaks to the link between individual and community levels of identity, and local citizenship conveys the potential for local government structures to represent and/or reinforce the interrelationship of individual and collective identities. Kolesas, in this issue, explores how local participation can fulfill individual goals of self-realization as well as operating at a community level, and argues that further improvements are needed in the mechanisms and models of participation if local government is to bridge the gap between individual and collective levels of political participation and identity.

Much of the literature on local citizenship stresses the importance of political rights, notwithstanding much of the concern in the literature with social rights (Marshall, 1964). The concept of citizenship carries with it a strong sense of the significance of political rights—questions of freedom of speech, democratic governance, and non-discrimination are all areas of political rights where local governments have important opportunities for action. Such political rights are often less costly to introduce than social rights, and much of the recent literature in this area is related to the fiscal constraints facing much of the public sector in many countries. There is also a concern to question whether or not Marshall's conception of the development of rights as linear—civil to political to social—is accurate, with recent studies (Soysal, 1994) providing examples of migrant workers with social but not political rights, and of the fact that women have generally received political

rights some time after gaining social ones. In this context, the precarious and unequal nature of all rights becomes more visible. The overall fragility of the idea of local autonomy adds to this sense of the possible loss of rights, and therefore increases concern for their importance. The concept of local citizenship thus helps to convey how people's attachment to their local community can be at risk and how it might need to be strengthened.

Following from this political definition is the use of citizenship as a means of expressing the collective construction of an area in which the questions of attachment and belonging can be debated. Local citizenship captures the idea of the city and the locality as the appropriate levels for an arena of debate, for the construction of a metaphoric agora in which citizens can deliberate their collective choices. In this context researchers highlight local government's potential to create a public space for such debate and deliberation, and in so doing reflect not only the increasing diversity of modern cities but also stress the political and procedural dimensions, a theme developed by Hamel in this issue. The governance of diversity relates to the existence of public spaces where different groups can debate, listen, and work out ways of reconciling diversity and the multiplicity of identities that exist within the urban collectivity. Iris Marion Young's description of the "unoppressive city" as a place "where deviance is tolerated, multiple races, classes, and ethnic groups live alongside each other" (Stavro-Pearce, 1996) links this heterogeneity to the idea of the existence of public spaces and to that of public equity or fairness. In this sense, citizenship is constructed through a process of mutual recognition of the importance of different groups' identities, a process which is dependent on debate and deliberation. The sense of citizenship emerges from finding positions of compromise, positions which will continually evolve through debates in which individuals and groups change their sense of self, in turn changing the overall process of debate and politics.

This sense of citizenship implies that the local level is not merely a deliverer of services, it is a proper government. By seeing local governance as a process which establishes the definition and consequences of community membership, one is emphasizing its qualities as a government and reflecting the arguments often made by local elected politicians for greater respect and greater autonomy from higher levels of government. Local citizenship is seen as being of the same nature as national citizenship and thus represents a claim that cannot be dismissed out of hand by national governments. In this way arguments about local citizenship form the basis of a claim to legitimacy on the part of local governments. By talking about local citizenship in the context of local governance, local governments are making a claim for greater consideration of their needs. This claim is based, as we have seen in relation to local citizenship, on their ability to carry out successfully activities that link the local population to their governments.

But there are other issues to be addressed if the quality of local government and local democracy is to be improved. In a recent collection of essays (King and Stoker, 1996) a number of authors address some of them. Space prohibits a full discussion; here we wish to highlight what are seen as key points which a debate about local government and local democracy must address. We draw on the work of authors such as Beetham, Frazer, Ward, Phillips, Cochrane, and King to illustrate these points.

First, as Beetham (1996) notes, we need to clarify the relationship between democracy and local government. He stresses three characteristics of representative democracy—accountability, responsiveness, and representativeness—on which

local government would score more highly than central government, though of course he notes, as we have already done, that there is room for improvement by elected local government. In terms of accountability, local government clearly performs better than central government and probably is better at enforcing accountability amongst different agencies than is the individual member of the public. Mill's argument about the limits of the capacity and interest of the centre in exercising detailed scrutiny over local level matters still holds true, as is evidenced not only from British experience but also by the eighties' reforms in Scandinavia (the so-called free commune experiments) and in France by the changing role of the prefect. But even so there is a need to improve accountability between the locality and the centre as well as between the centre and locality, especially in a country like Britain where the level of trust between these two levels has been reduced over the last twenty years. Furthermore, especially in systems characterized by increasing local governance rather than a single tier providing services, there is a need for coordination amongst and between different local agencies in order to improve the exercise of strategic choice at the local level (Clarke and Stewart, 1992).

So far as the individual is concerned, in a country like Britain, which has stressed the role of the individual as a consumer of services, it is difficult to see how consumers can enforce accountability on the many providers of local services. Fragmentation of service providers means it is more difficult for individuals to know exactly who is responsible for what. And in relation to a number of utilities in Britain there is growing evidence that consumers are unable to hold monopoly suppliers to account for many aspects of service provision, nor are they able to exercise choice by changing suppliers of these goods. The experience of both the gas and water industries is but one example.

Mill's arguments about the low degree of accountability of central as compared to local government applies equally to issues concerning the responsiveness of both levels of government. A nationally organized system of local administration cannot be as responsive to local interests and opinions as an elected local government, though almost by definition it can ensure some degree of equality (e.g., equal citizenship) (Peterson, 1981), but there is still a need to improve responsiveness. The case for an elected local government in this respect lies in a variety of factors— the diversity of local situations, the fact that local governments are more accessible; and, as we have already seen, that it is easier to introduce consultative practices at the local than at the national level. Indeed, the very existence of local elections provides an incentive for policy-makers and service providers to develop more responsive modes of consultation. And, in terms of representativeness, elected local government helps to ensure that all strands of opinion are represented in government at some level, as well as widening the opportunities for political participation; elected local government is likely to include more women, members of ethnic minorities, and part-time or unskilled workers elected to public office than is the case with national governments.

But even so, there is a need to explore this potential more fully on all fronts. For example, local accountability might be improved by increasing the autonomy of local elected governments. Certainly throughout Europe, with the notable exception of Britain, there has been a tendency since the early eighties to decentralize tasks and functions to lower tiers of government. Similarly, local accountability might be improved by a clear and sensible division of labour between the centre and locality; Bulpitt's theories about high and low politics are relevant in this

context (Bulpitt, 1983). Responsiveness might be increased with the introduction of some form of service decentralization, such as neighbourhood government, or through the use of user surveys, local referenda, and the introduction of general empowerment strategies of the type discussed above.

As far as increasing the representativeness of elected local government is concerned, the prime requirement is for fair electoral systems, probably some form of proportional representation, on the assumption that the purpose of elections is to register and represent public opinion. Better social representativeness might be obtained through legislation or the use of quotas, but achieving this objective is both more difficult and more controversial. What is clear, as Beetham argues, is that the work of elected representatives should facilitate rather than discourage participation among social groups.

But it is also important to extend ideas about democracy beyond elected local government, especially if governance in various forms persists, and beyond the institutions of government into civil society in its different forms and out into the community, whatever the latter means. It is important to consider arguments about the role of local governments in promoting equality, social justice, environmental improvement and sustainability, and the locality itself. In other words, if the democratic quality of local government is to be improved, there is a need to improve its performance in dealing with some of those issues with which modern states generally appear to have some difficulty.

Space permits only limited treatment of these questions, which are dealt with more fully in other contributions in this issue. For example, consider the issue of equality and the case of gender, some aspects of which have already been considered, but as Phillips (1996: 112) notes: "The supposed affinity between women and local democracy is relatively easy to establish—though also, perhaps easy to exaggerate." Does the supposed idea, as expressed in some British Conservative Party literature, that somehow women are well equipped for local government because it deals with matters relating to schools, child care and housing, all issues in which it is presumed women have a vested interest, actually hold true? Do not shifts towards more user involvement in, if not actual control of, such services have substantial consequences for women? Or, despite the claim that women are more likely to be excluded, simply because of the overwhelming preponderance of middle-class males (white to boot) in the ranks of elected local representatives? And if they did come to power, either as users, activists, or elected representatives, would not that power simply move elsewhere, as some Scandinavian feminists have claimed has happened in relation to their increased numbers in national legislatures and governments (Phillips, 1996: 116)?

Phillips argues that feminist politics provides two key principles that should underpin moves towards democratization. One to which reference has already been made, is that those who have been excluded or experience inequality or marginality know best what now needs to be done. Second, that excluded groups have to be enabled "not only to articulate, but also to expand and refine their areas of priority and concern" and to engage in a politics of transformation in order "to explore as-yet-unvoiced possibilities" (Phillips, 1996: 119). In this context small may not be beautiful; the local may increase exclusion (cf. the US suburban experience and ethnic minorities), and it may be that it is regional or national governments which can best secure social justice. But equally, the locality is often the initial arena of change and experimentation, as is suggested by Abrar, Lovenduski and Margetts in this issue. It is also the arena in which accessibility is likely to be greatest and most

open to influence, even if the outcomes may not be those desired by some partici-pants. In this sense, as Phillips (1996: 127) concludes: "Local democracy remains crucial for feminism because of its role in redefining political agendas." Prelimi-nary challenges on many issues are likely to occur at the local rather than the national level, even if only action at the national level can secure the kind of outcomes of equity and social justice which the feminist agenda demand.

And what of the environment and issues of sustainability? What role is there for local government and local democracy in this respect? At one level, if only because of the problem of externalities, local governments may seem to have little to do with securing environmental improvements. But, at another level, especially that associated with green movements generally, it is the local level which is seen as having the greatest potential for "achieving sustainable relationships with nature and satisfying forms of life for humankind" (Ward, 1996: 130). The environment has been a traditional pragmatic concern for local governments, from their concern with public health issues in the nineteenth century to their present concerns with Agenda 21 issues. Undoubtedly, then as now, the record of local government in this field has been uneven.

What about the role of Greens in promoting local democracy? Green writing places considerable stress on the value of community. Greens, with their slogan "Think globally, Act locally" believe that the key to the successful resolution of many environmental problems is "to change individuals' everyday behaviour and consumption patterns, something best done through local initiatives and intercom-munal processes" (Ward, 1996: 137). Small communities, of between five and a 1000 persons, argue Greens, would permit the use of informal social sanctions which would help overcome free-riding problems, for example. But the notion of small geographically defined communities on this scale poses all kinds of problems. Furthermore, it overlooks the important point that people's sense of community is multidimensional; as chess player, footballer, parishioner, employee, cinema goer, or whatever, an individual belongs to many communities and may belong to more than one place. Ward (1996: 140) suggests that local governments could play a kind of broker's role amongst these different communities or associations on environ-mental issues. In a form of local corporatism, it would be local governments which would build up trust among the participant communities or associations and would monitor the deals put together, as well as offering rewards for compliance or impos-ing sanctions for non-compliance amongst partners to the agreements.

Similar kind of arguments are employed by Greens in relation to issues of sustain-able economic development. Local governments, rather than chasing after elusive international investment, would be better served (and would provide a better service to their residents) if they encouraged the kind of economic development which worked for local consumption and reduced dependence on international capital. Such a move could lessen the conflict between the need for jobs and improved environmental conditions, while "a focus on creating less alienating work [might act] as an antidote to [increasing] consumerism" (Ward, 1996: 156).

Finally, Greens argue for a decentralist approach to the environmental problem generally, something which would not only strengthen local government, but also fits in with other arguments employed in favour of local government and local democracy. Greens stress the value of participation in much the same way as others have done as a means of improving the legitimacy of policy-making and imple-mentation. Even if problems of scale remain, and clearly there would be some issues which could only be settled at higher levels, Green writing and policy clearly see a

role for local democracy and local government in helping us move to a more sustainable environment.

There remains the issue of locality and its importance for this discussion. It was suggested earlier that what Page (1991) calls political localism—the effective representation of place in national politics—is well recognized as a justification for local government in many countries. Even in countries where forms of territorial localism have been discouraged, such as Britain and Scandinavia, it is clear that place or locality matters (Cooke, 1989; Harloe et al., 1990).

The issue is whether this dimension of local government should be strengthened. Authors such as Stewart have long argued that democratically elected local governments allow for local choice and local diversity—as is indeed implied in the very idea of local government as a form of territorial politics. He has also argued that the fragmentation of local government in Britain, for example, undermines the ability of local governments effectively to exercise local choice transferred to other agencies (Stewart, 1991; 1992). Essentially what is at issue is the extent to which diversity and local choice is both desirable and can be tolerated in a political system. It is an objective that has to be judged in competition with others that society seeks to maintain or achieve: Bollens in this issue reflects on some aspects of this dimension, albeit in the context of divided cities if not in that of local governments as a whole.

In a sense one is arguing for a local democratic polity rather than local representative government, where the locality is seen as a contested political space in which local politics are a means of deciding "collectively binding rules and policies" and providing for the "resolution of disagreements." In this sense local politics are a means of "reconciling and revealing preferences" while building a local polity which displays the "civic virtues of trust, cooperation, reciprocity . . . sharing experience and collective deliberation" (Fraser, 1996). Yet one also wishes to avoid the trap of localism—or reifying the local and local autonomy—which dogs so much of the discussion on local government in Britain. In this context elected local governments have an instant role to play since they organize coalitions, and act as broker to produce a public interest capable not only of dealing with the traditional political agenda but also with those now excluded. Such an open and accessible institution might not only be responsible and accountable but it could also enhance the capacity for political action amongst individuals—thus promoting citizenship in its widest range.

Enough has been said to indicate the broad-ranging nature of current thinking and experience of local government and local governance, on the values societies seek to promote through democratic local institutions and on the issues illustrating some of these concerns in the articles that follow. Hopefully they will contribute to the continuing debate on the nature of the local polis.

Notes

1. Indeed, one might note that constitutional provisions in Scandinavian countries such as Denmark place limitations on the ability of local government to operate in the economic sphere.
2. For example, the State of Victoria in Australia abolished elected local governments, replacing them with appointed commissioners. Subsequently there was a further reorganization which saw the return of elected local governments, although they were fewer and their size generally larger.

3. However, almost twenty years later the same author was moved to write that such service efficiency arguments were exaggerated (Sharpe, 1988).
4. Space prohibits a detailed discussion of case examples. For Britain see, *inter alia*, Stoker (1992) and Cochrane (1993).
5. Indeed, similar processes have been adopted by municipalities of a more radical perspective which seek to increase public participation, or which are more community orientated. For a discussion of such moves in a British context see Burns, Hambleton and Hoggett (1994) and Hill (1994).
6. Goldsmith is grateful to Harald Baldersheim for redressing this balance in an over-enthusiastic presentation made in Florence in August 1996.

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Biographical Notes

CAROLINE ANDREW teaches political science at the University of Ottawa. Her research looks at social policy in Canadian municipalities, particularly at policies relating to women's interests and at policies relating to multiculturalism. ADDRESS: University of Ottawa, Department of Political Science, PO Box 450, Station A, Ottawa, ON, Canada K1N 6N5.

MICHAEL GOLDSMITH is Professor of Politics and Government at the University of Salford. He has written extensively in the field of comparative local government and urban politics over the last thirty years. His most recent work includes an edited book on European Integration and Local Government (jointly edited with K. K. Klaussen), and chapters on local autonomy and theories of local government. He is currently engaged on joint studies of local government chief executives and of local elites in collaboration with a number of international scholars in the field. ADDRESS: Department of Politics and Contemporary History, University of Salford, Salford M5 4WT, England.